

## [J. F. Henderson]

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FOLKSTUFF - RANGELORE

Range-lore

Elizabeth Doyle

San Angelo, Texas.

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J.F. (Red Horse) Henderson has been a resident of Coleman County for 58 years. Born in Robertson County, Texas in 1864 he came to Coleman with his father's family at the age of fifteen and has lived there continuously, except when off on drives.

"I can hardly remember when I became a cowhand", says Mr. Henderson, "for I think I began to fool with cattle long before I was old enough to make a first class hand. My father and four neighboring families decided to throw their luck together and try the wild and woolly west. Each family had a bunch of cattle, kids, and some horses. The women and children, chickens and dogs were all rounded up and the covered wagons made ready. Most of the men and boys were to go on 2 horseback and drive the cattle, which were all thrown together in one big herd. We enjoyed the trip through and only had one encounter with Indians. They came up in great numbers one morning as we were cooking breakfast. They were friendly and only wanted food but we were scared almost to death before we got rid of them. We had plenty of food but there were so many of them that they almost cleaned up our supply and any old timer knew better than to refuse an Indian food, whether there was one or a thousand, if he had it. We always felt lucky to get off that light.

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"When we reached Coleman County we really pioneered in getting located. We settled at the foot of some small mountains north of Talpa. After a sort of community camping, each family branched off and started their own little homes in the good old fashioned way. Our first houses were crude affairs but comfortable and by 1884 we were all pretty well established with regular ranches and a good sized bunch of cattle.

"By this time I was beginning to think I was about grown and was considered one of the best cowhands in the country. I joined up with the Concho Cattle Company and was with them a number of years. I ran cattle from the Concho Country to the Rio Grande. I have been up the trail many times and didn't mind the so-called hardships of the drives. The stampede was our worst trouble and as that didn't happen every night, I can look back on the old days with a memory of more good than bad. 3 "Riding bronchos was a favorite sport with cowboys. I remember some of the boys once had up a bet on my riding an old red horse which we called Baldy, because of his white face. Baldy was saddled and brought out and I was ready and to try him. Just as I mounted he turned his head around and tried to bite me. His old walled eyes looked like new moons and the Devil was in them. Well he just stuck his old head down between his fore-logs and bawled like a wild bull and tried to turn a somersault with me. As I went over his head my new shirt caught on the saddle horn and just ripped it off. I was lucky, however, to go over his head instead of under him as the horn of a \$50.00 saddle was broken off as he went over.

"In 1874 D. E. Sims of Paint Rock and I, drove 2500 head of cattle to New Mexico. That was considered a big bunch for one drive and we were not sorry when we arrived. We only had one stampede on the way though and didn't lose any cattle as was often the case where there were so many cattle and not enough hands. This stampede was not unusual in anyway. A thunder storm blew up and the loud peals of thunder frightened them, so away they went like mad. We didn't have to run them all night though and when we finally got them quited about midnight, the storm had ceased and they were unusually easy to handle. Before we got to the Barr Ranch we were joined by J. F. (Jim) Hinkle,

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who remained with the Barr outfit for seventeen years. He was then elected to the senate and was governor of New Mexico in 1923 4 and '24. I had not seen the old boy in fifty-two years and did not know if he was dead or alive until last summer when he saw my picture and a write-up on my range experience in the Fort Worth Star Telegram and came to see me.

“When I was with the Concho Cattle Company, there were twenty of us boys. Now only five of us are left, so far as Jim and I could learn when he visited me. Bob Pierce, our boss lives in Denver, Colorado, Phil Wright, is Fire and Police Commissioner in San Antonio, Harve Earnest ranches at Water Valley, Ed Harte is a banker in an Oklahoma town and J. F. Hinkle is President of the First National Bank in Roswell, New Mexico. Last summer when Jim visited me we managed to get these five rounded-up and we had our pictures made. I wouldn't take a herd of cattle for that group. My children tell me I should have looked natural and not tried to hold my squint eye open but you know how it is, all the other boys trying to look and feel young as we use to. This eye of mine has given me lots of trouble and now I can't see out of it at all. You may know we didn't lose any time talking over old times when we all got together. We remembered so well a big drive near Salt Gap. We had the cattle all rounded-up and were preparing our bacon and coffee, while our Mexican helper was stationed about one-hundred yards from camps to watch the horses. All at once a band of Apache Indians swooped down upon us like a cyclone murdering the Mexican on the spot and fleeing with our saddle horses before our shots could stop them. 5 They got away with our horses and drove four herds of cattle out of Coleman County on across the Pecos River, where we caught them. We hunted them for two days and nights after we got fresh horses and enough men to handle them. They gave up our horses without any trouble, when they saw our bunch as a part of them had taken the cattle on and we had them out numbered. We never did get the cattle. An Indian is the biggest coward in the world unless he has all the advantage or can do his dirt in a sneaky ways.

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"The Concho Cattle Company's brand was and read Lazy D.O.H. Their holdings covered some fifty miles square.

"When the sheep man began coming in he was resented by the cattle man because of his encroachment on his grazing land. So far as I know there were more fist fights than gun fights over these differences.

"The gun tales about the old time cowboy are unreasonably over done. After Indian depredations had ceased, the gun toatin' cowboy we see on our modern screens didn't exist.

"I was in only one bad shootin' scrape throughout my whole cowboy career. It was when our boss took a bunch of us out on the plains to White Lake near Lubbock, Texas, to get a horse which the foreman of a ranch out there had been holding for a debt. We rode up to the door and the foreman came out. Our boss offered to settle for the horse and take it but somehow they couldn't seem to get together on the terms and pretty soon they were fighting. One of our boys jumped off his horse to separate them and the foreman hollered 6 for a guy back in the house. This fellow came running out and took the boy for a round of fist fighting. Just when they were doing pretty well another fellow appeared in the door way with a winchester and pulled down on us all. Our boss didn't take time to get his horse but broke away on foot as fast as he could run. The next shot killed the boy and as he dropped to the ground I turned down on my horse's side, put spurs to him and was gone. I slowed down as I passed my boss and he leaped on behind. We made it to the next ranch, got the boys and a chuck wagon from there and went back for our boy. He was still lying in the front yard and not a man showed up as we lifted him to the wagon and started on our long, slow journey to Snyder, Texas, for burial. His father and mother lived near Snyder and had no thought but what he was well and happy until we arrived with the body.

"We hear and see a lot about cowboy riggin' and get ups but that, too, is exaggerated. Most of the boys in our outfit wore white shirts, stetson hats (hardly ten gallon sizes),

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chaps, spurs, and a kind of trousers known as California woolens. Ours was a high classed outfit and we would treat even a tenderfoot right until he got smart. We wouldn't tolerate any smart alecs in our bunch. We got one such number from Virginia once, so one day he got drunk and we poured sorghum molasses all over him, from the top of his high silk hat, to the toe of his highly polished boots. When he sobered up enough to realize his predicament, he 7 made for the creek and we never saw him again.

"If a guy kept his mouth shut and tried to learn, we all helped him every way we could.

"One of the narrowest escapes I ever had was when were branding a bunch of bulls. One big old bull broke his rope and turned on me, grazing my leg with his horn just as I sprang on my horse and made him leap the fence. This was all that saved us both.

"I was at a round-up once where two big bulls got into a fight. The owner was afraid that the larger bull was going to kill the smaller one, so he rode in on the fight and jabbed the big bull in the back with a pole. He whirled and made a rush for the horse, struck him just behind the shoulder and killed him instantly. As he fell to the ground, the man leaped off and barely escaped as he gored the horse madly, again and again.

"Bob Pierce was chasing a big bull once, down on Salt Creek. All at once the bull turned on the horse like a ferocious beast, ran under his belly, lifted his hind legs off the ground and turned him a complete somersault. Bob was almost killed in the fall and the horse was badly injured. We caught that old Devil and trimmed him. "Trimming" consisted of cutting off both horns and tail just as close up as the operation could be performed. It always took two or more man to trim one and woe be unto them if a rope broke. We trimmed lots of the rascals, I'll tell you.

"Plenty of funny things happened at the big round-ups. 8 I remember once when about one hundred-fifty men were working together a guy from the North walked up to Ben Polk and said 'Well, I've been looking for you for a long time'. Ben looked bewildered and stammered out some kind of an answer and the fellow said, 'Here's your dollar'. Ben

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looked still more baffled. 'This dollar was given to me six years ago', said the stranger, 'and I was instructed to give it to the next fellow I met who was uglier than I was, so here it is'. The boys all yelled and Ben did look bad sure enough then.

"We started to Oklahoma once with a big herd and camped at Colorado, Texas. About 9:00 p.m. we got the cattle all rounded-up on the bed ground and one old boy struck a match to light a cigarette. That was enough. The cattle went wild. We ran them all night long. Each boy had his bull's eye lantern. It is a strange fact that in a plains country one cannot see at night half so well as in a broken country. The sky line which is plainly visible in a broken country is entirely lost on the prairies and if we hadn't had those bull's eye lanterns we would have gotten badly lost that night. We got the cattle back together in time for breakfast from the chuck wagon next morning by lantern light.

"The boys all called me "Red" or "Red Horse" and I like to hear it yet. The remaining five of us, who are 'headin' for the last round-up have agreed to have a get-together each summer as long as there are two of us left."